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ABSTRACT

A survey instrument operationalizing 24 elements of professional performance was administered to 291 public relations educators across the nation, yielding a 43.6% response rate. Respondents assessed the extent to which a standard of professionalism currently exists for each of the 24 items. Educators tended to view writing/editing and graphics/production skills, ethical guidelines, accreditation, and "public relations as advocacy" as enjoying well established standards. Licensing, location of public relations on the organizational chart and inclusion of public relations in the dominant coalition were viewed as most lacking in a standard of professional performance. The 24 items factored into 6 dimensions. Assessments of professionalism along these six factors differed significantly as a function of sex, region, tenure of teaching, size of institutions, and whether the educator was accredited by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Comparing educators' assessments with practitioners' views expressed in an earlier national survey, it is clear that professional standards in public relations have yet to coalesce among educators or practitioners. Given the influence that educators have on the field's future, it is imperative that educators work to elevate the profession by promulgating professional standards among their students. (Contains three tables of data and 36 references.) (Author)

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Professional Standards in Public Relations: A Survey of Educators

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**Presented to the Public Relations Division,
National Communication Association**

November 20, 1997

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Professional Standards in Public Relations:

A Survey of Educators

Abstract

A survey instrument operationalizing twenty-four elements of professional performance was administered to 291 public relations educators across the nation, yielding a 43.6 percent response rate. Respondents assessed the extent to which a standard of professionalism currently exists for each of the twenty-four items. Educators tended to view writing/editing and graphics/production skills, ethical guidelines, accreditation, and "public relations as advocacy" as enjoying well-established standards. Licensing, location of public relations on the organizational chart and inclusion of public relations in the dominant coalition were viewed as most lacking in a standard of professional performance. The twenty-four items factored into six dimensions. Assessments of professionalism along these six factors differed significantly as a function of sex, region, tenure of teaching, size of institution, and whether the educator was accredited by PRSA. Comparing educators' assessments with practitioners' views expressed in an earlier national survey, it is clear that professional standards in public relations have yet to have coalesced among educators or practitioners. Given the influence that educators have on the future of the field, it is imperative that educators work to elevate the profession by promulgating professional standards among their students.

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Introduction

Purpose

What do public relations educators think about professional standards in the field? Some might dismiss the question as irrelevant with such introspective research deemed "navel-gazing" or unnecessary when true respect is accorded a profession. Others might defend questions regarding professionalism in public relations on the grounds they are important because of the increasing recognition of public relations as essential across a myriad of organizational objectives.

This study seeks to answer the question by using a national survey which asked public relations educators what they think about professional standards in the field. It is based on the view that both educators and practitioners must look inward and define standards of professional performance so that the field may achieve and maintain professionalism. In light of the relative youth of our profession, academic research can serve to nurture ideas and attitudes toward professional practice of public relations. Educators play the key role in preparing the future generations of practitioners to aspire to the high standards which may ultimately win the field the respect it craves and most often deserves. The study of professionalism in public relations must challenge the assumption that professional standards have yet been defined, much less achieved in our field.

Professional Standards Literature

Interdisciplinary guidelines for a "profession" generally include requirements for (1) a well-defined body of scholarly knowledge; (2) completion of some standardized and prescribed course of study; (3) examination and certification by a state; and, (4) oversight by a state agency which has disciplinary powers over practitioners' behaviors (Wylie, 1994). Other criteria include intellectualism, a code of ethics, a comprehensive self-governing organization, greater emphasis

on public service than self-interests such as profits, performance of a "unique and essential service based on a substantial body of knowledge," broad autonomy, and "having practitioners guided by altruism" (Wright, 1981, p. 51).

Nelson (1994) offered five major characteristics of professionalism:

* professional values
* membership in professional organizations
* professional norms
* an intellectual tradition
* development of technical skills

These five elements serve to neatly summarize initiatives in our professional organizations, articles in the trade literature (Australia, 1993; Bovet, 1994; Fenton, 1977; Marston, 1968; McKee, Nayman & Lattimore, 1975; Ranney, 1977; St. Helen, 1992; Warner, 1993) and twenty years of academic work on professional standards in public relations (see, for example, Gitter & Jaspers, 1982; Judd, 1989; Rentner & Bissland, 1990; Ryan, 1986; Wright 1978, 1981). The remaining articles in the public relations literature take more of a topical, polemical focus, arguing for or against licensing (Baxter, 1986; Bernays, 1983, 1992, 1993; Forbes, 1986; Lesly, 1986), accreditation and education (Hainsworth, 1993; Wylie, 1994), ethics, and social responsibility (Bivins, 1992; Judd, 1989; Ryan, 1986; Sharpe, 1986), to name just a few. (For a more complete review, see Cameron, Sallot & Weaver-Lariscy, 1996.)

The views offered in the trade literature and the results of empirical studies in the academic literature, suggest a number of facets of professionalism in public relations. Cameron, Sallot and Weaver-Lariscy (1996) set out to gauge how well we are progressing in settling on standards for

these facets, reporting mixed results. In a national survey of 251 public relations practitioners in the U.S. assessing the extent to which a standard of professionalism currently exists, respondents were asked to rate twenty-four professional attributes drawn from the research literature and nearly 200 hours of in-depth interviews with sixty practitioners. Survey respondents tended to view ethical guidelines, accreditation and writing/editing skills as enjoying well established standards. Licensing, location of public relations on the organizational chart and inclusion of public relations in the dominant coalition were viewed as most lacking in a standard of professional performance.

The twenty-four items representing professional attributes factored into eight dimensions. activities-skills-managing through goals and objectives; salary; research; role in the organization; ethical guidelines; education-training; racial-gender equity; accreditation-licensing. Assessments of professionalism along these eight factors differed significantly as a function of age, education, race and both length and geographic region of practice of public relations.

Weaver-Lariscy, Sallot and Cameron (1996) further reported data that contrasted how men and women in public relations perceive a global standard of justice with how they experience justice issues instrumentally. While there was much agreement that standards are emerging for some issues and practices though not for others, when it comes to justice and equity for all, men and women disagree. The authors concluded that men "see" more justice and equity in the system than women experience, precluding women from viewing "just and equitable" standards in the field. Apparently, such professional standards don't mesh with the female experience in the field.

In an analysis of forty-five professional standard items measuring the degree of perceived consensus about professional standards and the accuracy of perceptions of peer professionalism

with the same sample of 251 practitioners, Sallot, Cameron and Weaver-Lariscy (1997) found that public relations professionals across the nation tend to underestimate the current state of professional standards in the field. This state of affairs, described in coorientation theory (Chaffee & McLeod, 1968; Kim, 1986) as pluralistic ignorance (Glynn, Ostman & McDonald, 1995), suggests that our field may actually hold higher standards and greater confidence in standards than we commonly attribute to our peers. Following the third-person effect (Davison, 1983), respondents tended to view themselves as better able to withstand pressures and outdated thinking than their peers.

In fact, Sallot, Cameron, and Weaver-Lariscy (1997) found that practitioners held their peers in comparatively low esteem, viewing others collectively as somewhat naive, unprofessional and unenlightened in comparison to their own personal self-images. While female practitioners are generally less sanguine about gender and racial equity in public relations, women tend to be more optimistic about standards for ethics and professional functions such as planning and research. Women also tended to be less harsh in their rating of peer professionalism, while also attributing lower values to others.

While some research has investigated educators' views on professional news values and journalistic behaviors in public relations (see, for example, Habermann, Kopenhaver, & Martinson, 1988), no previous studies have examined public relations educators' views on professional standards per se. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Research Questions

The current study set out to learn first the extent to which educators in public relations perceive standards to be in place for each of the following items:

Educational background

Continuing education/training

Research strategies for campaign planning

Management skills

Ethical guidelines for media relations

Ethical guidelines for client/practitioner relations

Accreditation

Research strategies for program implementation

Research strategies for program evaluation

Licensing

Documented accountability of public relations to clients/employers

Technical skills -- writing and editing

Technical skills -- graphics and production

Budgeting skills

Salaries for technicians

Salaries for managers

Salaries for executives

Managing public relations through goals and objectives (a system)

Gender equity in opportunity

Racial equity in opportunity

The location of public relations on the organizational chart

The inclusion of public relations in the "top decision team"

Public relations as an advocate for a client or a point of view

How public relations should operate, i.e., as publicity, public information, liaisons, etc.

Method

Data reported here are drawn from a national survey of public relations educators conducted in November 1995. The survey instrument was modelled after the questionnaire developed and used by Cameron, Sallot, and Weaver-Lariscy (1996) in their 1994 national survey of public relations practitioners. That instrument was derived from information compiled in a series of depth interviews conducted with a regional sample of sixty corporate and non-profit executives about broad concepts that emerged from the literature examination, and included topics such as education, training, ethics, research, management skills, gender and minority issues, and relationships among publics.

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Like its precursor, the survey instrument used in the present study is designed in three parts. Part 1 of the instrument asks respondents to indicate, across a variety of topics, whether or not a uniform standard exists in public relations. Instructions read:

> Public relations is a constantly changing, evolving, professional activity. We would like to know your opinions as to whether or not there are any uniform standards that exist in public relations. For each of the activities or issues listed below, please tell us if you believe there is a widely recognized standard, no standard at all, or something between.

Part 1 then consists of a list of twenty-four specific performance items, each measured by a five-point Likert-type scale where one equals "no standard exists/no uniformity at all" and five equals "a widely accepted, generally agreed upon standard exists across much of the profession." Sample topics include: educational background, ethical guidelines for client relations, racial/gender equity, salaries, and several management systems and techniques.

A second battery of forty-five questions was included in Part 2 of the instrument. The items were designed to enable coorientational analysis of educators' perceptions of professionalism and of their educator-peers' and practitioners' perceptions of professionalism. The data gathered in Part 2 of the instrument is being analyzed and will be reported in a separate study founded on theoretical coorientation literature.

Part 3 included personal demographics and professional descriptive information.

The Sample. The sample consisted of all 291 names in the 1995 membership directory of the Educators Section of the Public Relations Society of America. Questionnaires were mailed with a cover letter requesting participation and were accompanied by a postage-paid return envelope. The initial mailing yielded 91 usable responses for a 31.3 percent return rate. A followup mailing made to non-respondents in January 1996 achieved an additional 36 responses,

or 12.4 percent. Total usable responses received from 127 educators yielded an overall effective response rate of 43.6 percent.

Results

Description of Sample

Of the 127 educators participating in the survey, 64 percent (N = 81) were male and 36 percent (N = 46) were female. About a third (N = 42) were aged 30-48, another approximate third (N = 44) were aged 49-57, with the oldest group (N = 35) aged 58-77.

Nearly 92 percent (N = 116) of the respondents were Caucasian; 4 percent (N = 5) were Hispanic; 1.6 percent (N = 2) were African-American; .8 percent (N = 1) Asian, and 2.4 (N = 3) "other," respectively; there were no Native American respondents.

Nearly 53 percent (N = 67) of the educators reported having acquired doctoral degrees and 40 percent (N = 51) had achieved master's degrees. Six percent (N = 8) possessed bachelor degrees, while .8 percent (N = 1) reported "some high school." More than a third of respondents (N = 44) majored as undergraduates in journalism, 16 percent (N = 20) in speech communication, 8 percent (N = 10) in political science, 7 percent (N = 9) in English, while only 3 percent (N = 4) each majored in public relations, mass communication and business, with others spread among a variety of fields. Almost 19 percent (N = 24) indicated graduate work in speech communication, 18 percent (N = 23) in public relations, 16.5 percent (N = 21) each in journalism and mass communication, 9 percent (N = 12) in business, and the balance across other fields.

Nearly 30 percent (N = 38) of educators reported enrollments of less than 10,000 at their institutions, 29 percent (N = 37) enrollments of 10,000 to 20,000, 26 percent (N = 33) 20,000 to 30,000, and 13 percent (N = 17) more than 30,000. Thirty-five percent (N = 44) were located in

the Midwest, 31 percent (N = 40) in the Southeast, 17 percent (N = 22) in the Southwest, 12 percent (N = 15) in the Northeast, and 4 percent (N = 5) in the Northwest. Seventy-eight percent (N = 99) reported being affiliated with publicly-funded institutions and 20 percent (N = 25) privately-funded. Forty-four percent (N = 56) of the institutions were ACEJMC-accredited, 56 percent (N = 71) were not accredited.

Half of Educators Have More Than 10 years' PR Experience, Are PRSA-Accredited

Thirty percent (N = 38) of the educators reported practicing public relations for 5-10 years; 24 percent (N = 30) 11-20 years; 25 percent (N = 32) 21-45 years; and 12 percent (N = 16) less than four years. During their public relations careers, 55 percent (N = 70) reported having worked in a government setting at one time or another, 40 percent (N = 51) in corporate, 27 percent (N = 34) in agencies, and 16 percent (N = 21) in "other" settings. About half (N = 63) said they had held managerial posts, while 21 percent (N = 26) described their functions as "technical," 8 percent (N = 10) as "executive," 6 percent (N = 8) as a combination of "technical-managerial," 4 percent (N = 5) as "other," and 1.6 percent (N = 2) as "all." Fifty-seven percent (N = 72) of the educators reported being APR-accredited by PRSA. Forty-three percent (N = 55) were not accredited.

Professional Activities and Roles

When asked to indicate "the type of public relations model you practiced when you worked in public relations," 72 percent (N = 91) marked "some combination," 6 percent (N = 7) "public information," 3 percent (N = 4) "negotiation-adaptation,"
2 percent (N = 3) indicated "publicity," and 2 percent (N = 2) said they practiced "all" models. No one marked "persuasion-compliance"; 18 percent (N = 23) did not answer the question.

Asked to indicate "which of the following best describes the relationship between public relations and marketing in most organizations," 62 percent (N = 79) said the departments were "separate but unequal," 10 percent (N = 13) each said the departments were "separate but equal" and "PR functions are within the marketing department," while 6 percent (N = 8) said both functions are managed under another department, and 3 percent (N = 4) reported "marketing functions are within the PR department." Eight percent (N = 10) did not respond to the question.

Asked to rank order the top three tasks that "take the majority of practitioners' time," respondents most frequently cited media relations, maintaining the organization's reputation, marketing communications; financial, community, investor, and employee relations; planning, and special events management.

Current Standards

The first column in Table 1 presents how educators ranked each performance item and the second column reporting educators' mean rating of the extent to which an agreed-upon standard exists for each performance item. Educators tended to view writing/ editing skills, ethical guidelines, accreditation and technical skills in graphics and production as enjoying well established performance standards. Relatively positive response was also given for standards the view of public relations as advocacy and gender equity in opportunity. Licensing, location of public relations on the organizational chart, inclusion of public relations in the dominant coalition, how public relations should operate and continuing education/training were viewed as most lacking in a performance standard of professionalism.

Table 1 about here

Overall, there was a tendency to means close to the neutral value on the five-point scale. The third column in Table 1 presents the percentage of educators offering a neutral rating for each item. Both the means and the sizable component of neutral respondents suggests that there is little consensus about most facets of performance in public relations. Not only is there a fairly strong tendency to a neutral response, on some items there occurred a bi-modal distribution of responses among those who are not neutral.

In other words, the respondents were split on some items. This split in opinion was not highly polarized, however. Only a minority of respondents offered ratings at either end of the scale from 1 to 5. Of the 48 opportunities to select either a strong positive (5 on the rating scale) or negative opinion (1 on the rating scale) for the twenty-four items, half (24) of these cells in the data set had more than 10% response. Expressed in terms of Kurtosis, only three items -- licensing, accreditation and writing/editing technical skills -- derived a value greater than 1. Only nine of the twenty-four items had values greater than .50 (+/-) for Kurtosis. In simple terms, about one-fourth to one-third of respondents selected one of the middle three values for each item, with the sole exception being licensing and accreditation.[1]

Dimensions of Professionalism

To determine if any dimensions of professionalism in public relations could be identified, responses to the twenty-four items measuring uniformity of standards across the profession were subjected to factor analysis (for results, see Table 2). A principal components extraction using a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization yielded six factors which together explained 57.8 of the variance. Four of the six factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The rotation procedure

converged in seven iterations.

Table 2 about here

Among the twenty-four variables, the first factor, consisting of seven variables describing research activities, managing through goals and objectives, continuing education, how public relations should operate and accreditation accounted for 30.2 percent of the variance. The second factor, consisting of three salary variables, accounted for 7.8 percent of the variance. The third factor, made up of six variables describing activities, training and licensing, accounted for 7.2 percent of the variance. Factor four, consisting of four variables describing public relations' role in the organization, explained 5.2 percent of the variance; factor five, with two variables describing racial and gender equity, accounted for 3.9 percent of the variance; and factor six, with two items referring to ethical guidelines, 3.5 percent of the variance.

All six factors were subjected to Cronbach's alpha test of internal consistency. With alpha scores ranging from .74 to .89, all of the six factors showed reasonable-to-high internal consistency (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

Post Hoc Analysis

In an attempt to learn more about practitioner views of professional standards, a series of analyses of variance were conducted. The six dimensions[2] of professionalism derived from factor analysis were treated as dependent variables in Oneway ANOVA computations employing selected demographic variables as factors. Table 3 presents the statistically significant findings from the analyses.

Table 3 about here

Ratings of the extent that standards exist for racial and gender equity differed significantly by educators' gender. Male

educators held a higher rating of equity (3.3) than did female educators (2.6).

The degree to which role enjoys an established, agreed-upon standard varied significantly as a function of educators' geographic region and how long educators had been teaching. Educators with longer tenure, i.e. 25 years' teaching or more, rated standards for role higher (3.36) than did those who had taught for only four-to-ten years (2.39). Also, educators from the Northeast rated role higher (3.09) than those from the Southeast (2.4) in terms of an accepted standard being in place.

In rating the degree to which a standard exists for research/management competency, significant differences were found as a function of educators' region and whether the educator is PRSA-accredited. Accredited educators rated the standard higher (2.99) than did educators who are not accredited (2.63). Educators from the Southwest rated the standard higher (3.15) than did educators from the Southeast (2.57).

To the extent that a professional standard exists for salary, region was significant. Educators from the Northeast rated the standard higher (3.33) than did educators from the Southeast (2.59) and from the Midwest (2.52).

There were no significant differences in ratings for the dimensions describing activities/training and ethics or across any of the previously mentioned dimensions by educators' age, educational background, ethnicity, length of experience practicing public relations, type of funding of their institutions, and whether their institution is ACEJMC-accredited.

Comparing Educators' and Practitioners' Ratings of Professional Standards

To compare educators' evaluations of professional standards with public relations practitioners' assessments, the data from the present study of educators was combined with the data from the national survey of practitioners[3] conducted by Cameron, Sallot, and Weaver-Lariscy (1996).[4]

Table 1 summarizes the results of t-tests between educators' and practitioners' ratings of the twenty-four items as to whether standards of professionalism exist. Educators and practitioners ranked eighteen of the twenty-four items differently. There were significant differences in means for four items. Educators rated standards writing and editing technical skills (4.02) and graphics and production technical skills (3.32) higher than did practitioners (3.47 and 3.06, respectively). Conversely, educators rated standards for continuing education/training (2.57) and for how public relations should operate (2.50) lower than did practitioners (2.94 and 2.76, respectively).

Among practitioners, there were even stronger patterns of neutrality on most items and bi-modal responses for those not neutral on specific items. For practitioners, of the 48 opportunities to select either a strong positive (5 on the rating scale) or negative opinion (1 on the rating scale) for the twenty-four items, only nine of these cells in the data set had more than 10% response. Only six of the twenty-four items had values greater than .50 (+/-) for Kurtosis and only licensing derived a Kurtosis value greater than 1. A principal components factor analysis

using a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization of the practitioners' data yielded eight factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and which together explained 71.8 of the variance. Six of the eight factors had Cronbach's alphas ranging from .73 to .90, but two factors had low alphas and proved inconsistent.

Among practitioners, the degree to which technical skills enjoy an established, agreed-upon standard varied significantly as a function of age and ethnicity; to the extent that a professional standard exists for organizational status of public relations, ethnicity, region, and length of practice were significant; standards for salaries varied by ethnicity; educational preparation standards varied by age and region; and racial/gender equity differed by educational background of practitioners.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The twenty-four items offer a carefully developed battery of items specific to public relations **performance**. Following the lead of Wright (1978; 1981), a set of questions was further developed and refined (Cameron, Sallot, & Weaver-Lariscy, 1996) to yield more specific, more performance-oriented items. Those items were used in the present study of educators' assessments of professional standards.

It is evident from this study and compared with the previous study that educators' tendencies to neutral responses and practitioners' mixed opinions for most items with bi-modal groupings for non-neutral responses, that the nature of professional standards is nebulous among public relations educators, though less so than among practitioners. Nevertheless, some generalizations can emerge, aside from the conclusion that educators are only a bit further ahead

of practitioners in forging opinion about performance standards in public relations.

Given the ethics and social responsibility themes in the literature over the past twenty years, it is encouraging to note the confidence offered by educators as well as practitioners for ethical guidelines. It is less surprising to find that writing and editing, primary skills in the field, would be viewed as having a uniform standard among educators as well as practitioners, or for graphics/production skills among educators alone; considerable emphasis is placed upon writing/editing and graphics/production skills taught by these educators (Design, 1993). Educators also identified standards for accreditation, view of public relations as advocacy, and gender equity in opportunity in contrast to practitioners.

Status in the organization, and operational procedures in the field along with licensing, were the closest to a resounding "probably not" in terms of established professional standard among both educators and practitioners. Educators were even less likely than practitioners to see a standard for continuing education or training.

The twenty-four items were reduced through factor analysis into six dimension for educators and eight dimensions for practitioners. These dimensions offer considerable coherence and face validity, especially among educators. In future research and initiatives of professional organizations, it is hoped that a broader, more comprehensive array of components will be considered in discussions of professionalism in public relations. Reflecting, but building upon the various lists of key elements of professionalism, the studies offer the following:

From educators:	**From practitioners:**
Research/Management Competency	**Technical Skills**
Salary Levels	**Salary Levels**

Skills/Training	**Research Competency**
Role/Status	**Organizational Status**
Gender and Racial Equity	**Ethical Performance**
Ethical Performance	**Education**
	Gender and Racial Equity
	Accreditation

Post hoc analysis reflects several recurring themes. Women working in public relations education, as do women working in the field, see less parity in gender equity than do their male counterparts. Long-term teachers are more optimistic about status and role than are newer teachers, perhaps reflecting an ivory-tower effect the longer one is absent the field. Regional influences as they impact educator attitudes are difficult to explain, but region in the educators' survey reflects location of institution, not region of practice.

Practical Implications

The consistent splits in opinion, combined with large neutral responses, for both educators and practitioners suggest we are a long way from consensus or from confidence in any shared standards of professional performance. However, the findings from the practitioners' study suggest that optimism among younger professionals stems from recent schooling and formal training in public relations. The findings from the educators' study reinforces even more strongly the sense that standards exist, particularly among the educators doing the teaching.

Educators must continue to build upon their apparent success in imparting a focus to their students about performance standards. Especially given the finding from the coorientational study of perceptions of professionals about their peers' standards that public relations is generally more

professional than widely believed by its practitioners (Cameron, Sallot, & Weaver-Lariscy, 1997), it will be critical for educators to help elevate the self-esteem of the field through improving self-images among their students, the field's newest practitioners.

As a profession, public relations practitioners should look forward to the continued infusion of competent, enthusiastic practitioners actually schooled and trained in public relations who may have been taught and carry a clearer sense of how to perform as professionals. Also, the current samples included only a minority of educators and practitioners formally schooled in public relations. The field needs to address this through continuing education and stronger publication in the trade journals of academic work that defines standards.

Further Research

The battery of performance items continues to show promise as a standardized means of monitoring progress of the public relations profession in establishing standards for an array of skills, conditions and states believed to reflect professionalism. The dimensions derived from the instrument offer a fairly comprehensive, graspable set of goals for professionalizing public relations. The dimensions should be the basis for programs and discussion of professionalism in the trade and academic literature.

Given the promise of the battery to establish norms over time for professional progress, further reliability and validity testing should be undertaken in the course of replicating the studies of both practitioners and educators; the groups should be surveyed every several years to monitor trends in professionalism. Such surveys should include a weighted sample to capture larger numbers of important sub-groups such as African-American practitioners.

Conducting periodic replications of the current instrument would enable time-series analysis

and a closer look at patterns such as regional and youthful optimism about established standards. An important side-benefit would be to accord regular attention to professional performance standards in public relations similar to the focus on the annual salary survey done by PRSA. Similarly, practitioners and educators in other countries should be studied to investigate the impact of culture and nationality on public relations standards.

Finally, a survey using the same instrument should be conducted with senior public relations students to assess the views of this important resource in the promulgation of standards.

Conclusion

Using a complete battery of items charting professional performance standards in public relations in a national survey of active educators revealed that educators, like their practitioner brethren, lack much conviction that standards are in place for most items. Further work is needed to fully encompass all aspects of professionalism and to monitor the field's progress toward a sense of shared standards among practitioners and educators alike.

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Notes

1. For the item "Technical skills -- graphics and production" 49 percent of educators chose value "4" and 32 percent chose value "5" towards the end point "widely accepted standard."

2. Although only four factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, because of the high alphas all six factors were subjected to analysis of variance.

3. It is important to note that a potential limitation of this comparison is that data from the survey of practitioners was collected approximately two years before data was collected for the present study of educators. Therefore, history poses a threat to internal validity of the comparison (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

4. In the Cameron, Sallot, Weaver-Lariscy (1996) study, 598 names from the 1993 PRSA national membership directory were randomly mailed the survey, yielding a 42 percent response rate.

Of the 251 practitioners participating in the survey, 55 percent (N = 138) were female and 43.4 percent (N = 109) were male. About a third (N = 81) were aged 41-50, almost another third (N = 76) were aged 31-40, with 16 percent (N = 41) aged 20-30, nearly 13 percent (N = 32) aged 51-60 and 8 percent (N = 19) aged 60-plus. Nearly 95 percent (N = 237) of the respondents were Caucasian; 1.6 percent (N = 4) were Hispanic; .8 percent (N = 2) were African-American, Native-American and "other," respectively; and one respondent was Asian-American.

Nearly equal numbers of practitioners reported working in corporate settings (N = 76), in government-nonprofit settings (N = 72) and in agency settings (N = 69). More than half (N = 131) said they held managerial posts, while 19 percent (N = 47) described their functions as "executive," 12 percent (N = 30) as "technical," 10 percent (N = 24) as a combination of "technical-managerial," 4 percent (N = 10) as "other," 2 percent (N = 5) as "all."

Sixty-two percent (N = 155) of the practitioners reported having acquired bachelor's degrees and 32 percent (N = 79) had achieved master's degrees. Nearly 4 percent (N = 9) possessed doctoral degrees, while fewer than 3 percent (N = 7) reported "some college." Almost a third of respondents (N = 78) majored in journalism, 13 percent (N = 33) in English, and 12 percent (N = 30) in speech communication, while only 6 percent (N = 14) majored in public relations. Forty-six percent indicated graduate work in a variety of fields including speech communication, business, management, journalism, public relations, and English.

Almost one-third (N = 80) reported practicing public relations for 4-10 years; 20 percent (N = 40) 11-15 years; 16 percent (N = 40) 16-20 years; 12 percent (N = 30) 21-25 years; 11 percent (N = 28) more than 25 years; 8 percent (N = 20) three years or less; and two practitioners were retired.

More than one-third (N = 89) of the practitioners reported being APR-accredited by PRSA. Sixty-five percent (N = 162) were not accredited.

Just over half (N = 129) of the respondents reported annual incomes from public relations ranging from $20,000-$50,000; 28 percent reported incomes of $51,000-$100,000; 16 percent (N = 39) reported incomes in excess of $100,000; and only 2 percent (N = 5) reported incomes less than $20,000.

Almost a third (N = 78) of the professionals practiced in the Midwest; just over 20 percent practiced in the Northeast (N = 57) and Southeast (N = 54); 15 percent (N = 39) in the Southwest; 7 percent (N = 17) in the Northwest; and two reported practicing in all regions.

When asked to indicate "the type of public relations model that most closely describes what you do," 38 percent (N = 96) marked "public information," 21 percent (N = 53) indicated "publicity," 12 percent (N = 31) "some combination" and (N = 29) "persuasion-compliance," 5 percent (N = 12) "negotiation-adaptation," and 4 percent (N = 11) said they practiced "all"

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models.

Asked to indicate "which of the following best describes the relationship between public relations and marketing in your organization," nearly 25 percent of respondents said the departments were "separate but equal" (N = 61). Eighteen percent (N = 46) reported that "PR functions are within the marketing department," while 14 percent (N = 46) said the departments were "separate but unequal (N = 35), 12 percent (N = 31) said both functions are managed under another department, and 2 percent (N = 5) reported some combination of relationships. About a quarter (N = 61) did not respond to the question.

Asked to rank order the top three tasks that "take the majority of your time," respondents most frequently cited media relations, marketing communications, maintaining organization's reputation, planning, and special events management.

Questioned about types of research they conducted in the last year, 78 percent (N = 195) of the practitioners had conducted interviews, 59 percent (N = 148) had written questionnaires, 58 percent (N = 146) had conducted library research, 50 percent (N = 125) had engaged in issue tracking, 38 percent (N = 94) had conducted focus groups, and nearly a third (N = 81) had conducted telephone surveys.

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Table 1

Comparison of Educators' and Practitioners' Mean Ratings of Extent That a Standard Exists for Twenty-Four Dimensions of Professionalism

Professional standard	Educators' Ranking N=127	Educators' Mean Rating	Educators' % Neutral	Practs' Ranking N=251	Practs' Mean Rating	Practs' % Neutral	t-value
Technical skills -- writing and editing	1	4.02	11	4	3.47	23	-5.15*
Ethical guidelines for client/practitioner relations	2	3.51	30	1	3.71	27	1.68
Ethical guidelines for media relations	3	3.49	28	3	3.53	28	.38
Accreditation	4	3.34	22	2	3.59	18	1.74
Technical skills -- graphics and production	5	3.32	28	7	3.06	38	-2.19*
Public relations as an advocate for a client or a point of view	6	3.28	30	6	3.12	39	-1.30
Gender equity in opportunity	7	3.11	32	10	2.96	26	-1.24
Managing PR through goals and objectives (a system)	8	2.99	32	8	3.02	39	.29
Management skills	9	2.94	39	13	2.84	40	-.91
Educational background	10	2.93	38	5	3.12	29	1.55
Salaries for executives	11	2.89	37	9	2.97	38	.68
Racial equity in opportunity	12	2.86	31	18	2.71	28	-1.11
Research strategies for campaign planning	13	2.84	32	14	2.83	41	-.09
Research strategies for program evaluation	14	2.76	38	15	2.82	37	.52
Salaries for managers	15	2.74	44	16	2.78	44	.41
Research strategies for program implementation	16	2.71	35	12	2.88	42	1.50
Budgeting skills	17	2.69	40	21	2.63	38	-.53
Documented accountability of PR to clients/employers	18	2.65	30	19	2.68	35	.27
Salaries for technicians	19	2.58	39	20	2.66	42	.81
Continuing education /training	20	2.57	29	11	2.94	28	3.09*
How public relations should operate, i.e., as publicity, public information, liaisons	21	2.50	33	17	2.76	36	2.30*
The inclusion of PR in the "top decision team"	22	2.42	34	22	2.35	28	-.63
The location of PR on the organizational chart	23	2.27	25	23	2.34	28	.69
Licensing	24	1.58	9	24	1.71	14	1.15

* $p < .05$.

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Note. Each item was rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "No Standard Exists/No Uniformity At All" and 5 being "A Widely Accepted, Generally Agreed Upon Standard Exists Across Much Of The Profession".

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Table 2

Factor Matrix (Varimax Rotation) for Dimensions of Professionalism

	FACTOR 1 Research/ Management Competency	FACTOR 2 Salaries	FACTOR 3 Activities/ Training	FACTOR 4 Role	FACTOR 5 Sex/race equity	FACTOR 6 Ethics
Implementation research	.80495	.09885	.11718	.08385	.05863	.11444
Evaluation research	.77923	-.00249	.17365	.19658	.17174	.08676
Research for campaign planning	.71585	.17814	.20949	.00052	-.04486	.20044
Managing system (goals/objectives)	.63809	.18042	.16301	.15754	.05058	.18879
Continuing education	.48700	.22117	.39802	.12716	-.04925	.16237
How PR should operate	.44143	.09879	.18670	.34972	.13549	.07402
Accreditation	.35754	.02574	.16651	.16140	.11835	.23859
Manager salaries	.08458	.96450	.16976	.16171	.04868	.04621
Executive salaries	.13491	.77498	.07714	.09268	.08391	.05411
Technician salaries	.16716	.75601	.09706	.01645	.10654	.09144
Graphics/production	.16588	.09926	.78003	.03673	.05989	.13763
Writing/editing	.13227	.11805	.67642	.04135	.03649	.23023
Budgeting skills	.37708	.09587	.48548	.19969	-.01628	-.07147
Educational background	.28167	.08224	.47970	.25415	-.09323	.15851
Management skills	.35057	.29958	.43321	.13506	-.01653	.23960
Licensing	.07308	-.00248	.41190	.18715	.03347	-.18471
Location on organizational chart	.09009	.16021	.14928	.76773	.04969	.10362
Top decision team	.15995	-.04343	.11482	.75697	.17554	.12236
PR as advocate	.16555	.14428	.13330	.43066	.16908	.14922
Accountability	.33546	.11186	.35995	.37937	.07024	.04087
Gender equity	.10582	.18935	-.02152	.14411	.95440	.06500
Racial equity	.07131	.04280	.03668	.17719	.76240	.08672
Ethical guides for client relations	.31729	.07416	.06748	.14914	.10025	.80965
Ethical guides for media relations	.27344	.14673	.17281	.24861	.09944	.70670
Factor eigenvalues	7.3	1.9	1.7	1.2	.9	.8
Percent of variance	30.2	7.8	7.2	5.2	3.9	3.5
Factor mean (SD)	2.9 (.7)	2.8 (.9)	2.8 (.8)	2.7 (.8)	3.1 (1.0)	3.5 (1.0)
Cronbach's alpha	.78	.89	.85	.74	.87	.85

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Table 3

Significant Differences in Rating Dimensions of Professionalism as a Function of Demographic Variables by Public Relations Educators

Dimension of Professionalism*	Demographic Variable	F	df	p
Racial and gender equity	Sex	13.63	124	.0003
Organizational status reflected in location on organizational chart, inclusion in top decision team, role as an advocate and documented accountability	Region	3.10	125	.02
	How long teaching	3.79	121	.006
Salaries for executives, managers and technicians	Region	4.20	124	.003
	Size of Institution	2.43	123	.0685
Research strategies for campaign strategies, program implementation and program evaluation; managing by objectives, continuing education, model of public relations in organization, and accreditation.	Region	2.42	125	.05
	Accreditation	6.49	126	.01

Note. All analyses were conducted using Oneway Analysis of Variance. Non-Homogeneity of Variance was checked in all cases. Where appropriate, Tukey's range test was conducted to obtain honestly significant differences between group means.

* Dimensions were derived from the factor analysis.

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